

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1-13 (Cancelled)

14. (original) A plating apparatus for the spine, comprising:
a plate having an upper face, a lower face, and at least one hole therethrough extending between said upper and lower faces; and
a retaining element extending from said upper face adjacent said at least one hole, said retaining element having a first form wherein a screw is insertable into the at least one hole and being formable to a second form wherein at least a portion of said retaining element extends over said at least one hole.

15. (original) The apparatus of claim 14, wherein said retaining element is formed by applying a bending force to said retaining element.

16. (original) The apparatus of claim 14, wherein:
said plate has a generally triangular shape and includes an upper node and a pair of lower nodes; and
said at least one hole includes an upper hole through said plate at said upper node to receive a screw for passage into an upper vertebra, a first lower hole in said plate formed through one of said lower nodes to receive a screw for passage into a lower vertebra, and a second lower hole in said plate through the other of said lower nodes to receive a screw for passage into the lower vertebra.

17. (original) The apparatus of claim 16, wherein said retaining element is positioned adjacent said upper hole and further comprising:
a first lower retaining element extending from said upper face adjacent said first lower hole; and
a second lower retaining element extending from said upper face adjacent said second lower hole, wherein said first and second lower retaining elements each have a first form wherein a screw is insertable into the adjacent hole and are formable to a

second form wherein at least a portion of said retaining element extends over said adjacent hole.

18. (original) The apparatus of claim 17, wherein each of said retaining elements includes a connecting member integrally formed with said upper face of said plate.

19. (original) The apparatus of claim 18, wherein each of said retaining elements extends around said adjacent hole.

20. (original) The apparatus of claim 16, wherein each of said retaining elements extends from a base member attached to said upper face of said plate.

21. (original) The apparatus of claim 20, wherein there is a gap between said base member and each of said retaining elements.

Claims 22-50 (Cancelled).

51. (previously amended) A system for securing a plate to a spinal column segment, the system comprising:

- a plate having a generally triangular shape forming three vertices, said plate having a hole adjacent each vertex;

- an instrument including:

- a plate holding portion coupled to said plate and being configured to establish and maintain a defined relative position between said instrument and said plate;

- a shaft having a proximal handle portion and a distal end supporting said plate holding portion; and

- a support extending from said shaft, said support defining three guiding portions, each of said guiding portions corresponding to a respective one of said holes of said plate and arranged to guide a drill to said corresponding hole.

52. (original) The system of claim 51, further comprising a rod coupled to said shaft, said rod terminating in a bearing surface that bears on S1 upon positioning of said plate on the spinal column segment.

53. (original) The system of claim 51, further comprising a pusher that includes means for maintaining a position of said pusher on said plate.

54. (original) The system of claim 51, wherein said plate holding portion is detachable from said shaft.

55. (original) The system of claim 51, wherein the position of said support is adjustable.

56. (original) The system of claim 51, wherein said plate holding portion is attached to a lower edge of the plate.

57. (original) The system of claim 51, wherein said plate holding portion is attached to a hole in the center of said plate.

58. (previously added) A plating apparatus for the spine, comprising:
a plate having an upper face, a lower face, and at least one hole therethrough extending between said upper and lower faces; and
a retaining element extending from said upper face adjacent said at least one hole, said retaining element having a first form wherein a screw is insertable into the at least one hole and being formable to a second form wherein at least a portion of said retaining element extends over said at least one hole, wherein said retaining element is formed by applying a bending force to said retaining element.

59. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 58, wherein:

said plate has a generally triangular shape and includes an upper node and a pair of lower nodes; and

said at least one hole includes an upper hole through said plate at said upper node to receive a screw for passage into an upper vertebra, a first lower hole in said plate formed through one of said lower nodes to receive a screw for passage into a lower vertebra, and a second lower hole in said plate through the other of said lower nodes to receive a screw for passage into the lower vertebra.

60. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 59, wherein said retaining element is positioned adjacent said upper hole and further comprising:

a first lower retaining element extending from said upper face adjacent said first lower hole; and

a second lower retaining element extending from said upper face adjacent said second lower hole, wherein said first and second lower retaining elements each have a first form wherein a screw is insertable into the adjacent hole and are formable to a second form wherein at least a portion of said retaining element extends over said adjacent hole.

61. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 60, wherein each of said retaining elements includes a connecting member integrally formed with said upper face of said plate.

62. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 61, wherein each of said retaining elements extends around said adjacent hole.

63. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 59, wherein each of said retaining elements extends from a base member attached to said upper face of said plate.

64. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 63, wherein there is a gap between said base member and each of said retaining elements.

65. (previously added) A plating apparatus for the spine, comprising:
a plate having a generally triangular shape with an upper node positionable along an upper vertebra and a pair of lower nodes positionable along a lower vertebra;
an upper hole in the plate at the upper node to receive a screw for engaging the upper vertebra;
a first lower hole in the plate through one of the lower nodes to receive a screw for engaging the lower vertebra and a second lower hole in the plate through the other of the lower nodes to receive a screw for engaging the lower vertebra; and
means for blocking screws inserted in the upper hole and the first and second lower holes, wherein said means for blocking includes a triangular retaining element attached to said plate, said retaining element being movable from a first orientation wherein screws are insertable into each of said upper hole and said first and second lower holes to a second orientation wherein apices of said retaining element extend over respective ones of said upper hole and said first and second lower holes, wherein said retaining element includes a spring blade extendable therefrom to secure said retaining element in said second orientation.

66. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 65, wherein said retaining element includes a locking fastener extending therethrough and engageable to a central hole in said plate to secure said retaining element in said second orientation.

67. (previously added) A plating apparatus for the spine, comprising:
a plate having a general triangular shape, said plate having an upper hole near an upper vertex through which a screw is passed for securing said plate to the L5 vertebra, and a pair of lower holes situated near respective ones of first and second lower vertices of said plate, each of said pair of lower holes having a screw passed therethrough to secure said plate to the S1 vertebra; and
means for blocking screws seated in said upper hole and said pair of lower holes, wherein said means for blocking screws includes a retaining element threadingly attached to a central hole in said plate, said retaining element being configured to at least partially cover said upper hole and said pair of lower holes.

68. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 67, wherein said plate includes a posterior face having a protrusion extending along at least part of the width of said plate that bears against a lower lip of an anterior margin of a lower endplate of the L5 vertebra.

69. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 68, wherein said plate includes on said posterior face adjacent said pair of lower vertices protrusions that bear against a lower margin of an upper endplate of the S1 vertebra.

70. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 67, wherein said plate includes a posterior face having an edge about said plate, said posterior face including a ridge shaped protrusion adjacent said edge at the upper end of said upper vertex.

71. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 67, wherein said plate includes a posterior face having an edge about said plate, said posterior face including an anchoring point extending therefrom adjacent said upper vertex.

72. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 67, wherein said plate includes a posterior face having a generally concave shape.

73. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 67, wherein said pair of lower holes have an oblong shape extending in the direction toward said upper vertex.

74. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 67, wherein said retaining element has a substantially circular shape.

75. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 67, wherein said retaining element includes means for fixing said retaining element on said plate either in a first angular position leaving said upper hole and said pair of lower holes completely uncovered, or in

a second angular position at least partially covering said upper hole and said pair of lower holes.

76. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 75, wherein said means for fixing said retaining element includes an elastic tongue including a stud extending from a posterior face of said retaining element, said stud insertable in receiving seats formed on an anterior face of said plate.

77. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 67, wherein said retaining element has a generally triangular shape.

78. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 67, wherein said retaining element include three projecting flanges and cutouts between said flanges, whereby each of said flanges is positionable between respective adjacent ones of said upper hole and said pair of lower holes for screw insertion, said retaining element being movable to a second position wherein each of said flanges at least partially covers respective ones of said upper hole and said pair of lower holes.

79. (previously added) A plating apparatus for the spine, comprising:

a plate having a general triangular shape, said plate having an upper hole near an upper vertex through which a screw is passed for securing said plate to the L5 vertebra, and a pair of lower holes situated near respective ones of first and second lower vertices of said plate, each of said pair of lower holes having a screw passed therethrough to secure said plate to the S1 vertebra;

a retaining element attachable to a central hole in said plate, said retaining element configured to at least partially cover said upper hole and said pair of lower holes, said retaining element including an elastic tongue with a stud extending from a posterior face of said retaining element, said stud insertable in a receiving seat formed on an anterior face of said plate.

80. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 79, wherein said plate includes a posterior face having a protrusion extending along at least part of the width of said plate that bears against a lower lip of an anterior margin of a lower endplate of the L5 vertebra.

81. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 80, wherein said plate includes on said posterior face adjacent said pair of lower vertices protrusions that bear against a lower margin of an upper endplate of the S1 vertebra.

82. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 79, wherein said plate includes a posterior face having an edge about said plate, said posterior face including a ridge shaped protrusion adjacent said edge at the upper end of said upper vertex.

83. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 79, wherein said plate includes a posterior face having an edge about said plate, said posterior face including an anchoring point extending therefrom adjacent said upper vertex.

84. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 79, wherein said plate includes a posterior face having a generally concave shape.

85. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 79, wherein said pair of lower holes have an oblong shape extending in the direction toward said upper vertex.

86. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 79, wherein said retaining element has a substantially circular shape.

87. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 79, wherein said retaining element has a generally triangular shape.

88. (previously added) The apparatus of claim 79, wherein said retaining element includes three projecting flanges and cutouts between said flanges, whereby each of said

flanges is positionable between respective adjacent ones of said upper hole and said pair of lower holes for screw insertion, said retaining element being movable to a second position wherein each of said flanges at least partially covers respective ones of said upper hole and said pair of lower holes.